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ABSTRACT

This book provides an account and critique of the work ethic, a central aspect of modern capitalist society. Chapter 1 is an introduction. Chapter 2 considers social changes in Europe in the 16th-17th centuries, maintaining that work was imbued with moral qualities and wealth seeking acquired social legitimacy through religious sanction. Chapter 3 discusses how, with the rise of capitalism, wealth became an indicator of worth and determined social standing. Chapter 4 focuses on portrayal of inequality by businessmen, politicians, and writers as a result of individual variability in terms of character, virtue, and endeavor in the 19th-20th centuries. Chapter 5 examines inequalities the author says have been justified in the 20th century in terms of individual hard work, character, and education. Chapter 6 focuses on how employers motivate or coerce workers when unable to rely on a work ethic. Chapter 7 considers how employers have fostered people's identification with their work. Chapter 8 discusses more recent management methods to motivate workers and increase productivity. Chapters 9-10 discuss the strategy of ensuring that welfare is more difficult to get, more temporary, and unpleasant so fear of job loss keeps productivity high. Chapter 11 shows how the work ethic continues to be inculcated in schools. Chapter 12 discusses consumerism's role in ensuring that work remains central. Chapter 13 argues that embracing consumerism has ensured that working hours have increased. Chapter 14 is a conclusion. (Appendixes include a 166-item bibliography and index.) (YLB)

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